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Hanging Out in the Past: Looking for Trouble or Romance? An Exploration of the Practice and Meaning of Hanging Out for Young Dutch People in 1930–60

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Abstract

Young people's 'hanging out' has had different meanings in the recent and distant past in various countries and cultures, including delinquency or a common social phenomenon. Although there is evidence for hanging out as social behaviour in various countries, Dutch research on hanging out as a common social phenomenon is scarce. This article retrospectively explores the practice and meaning of hanging out for young people in the Netherlands between 1930 and 1960. Semi-structured qualitative interviews ($n = 60$) were analysed using the Constant Comparative Method, resulting in three key themes: familiarity, features and the meanings assigned to hanging out. Results indicate that hanging out was practised and known by most respondents, and included particular features (time, location, gender and routines). Meet, flirt with and date other young people was the most frequently mentioned meaning associated with hanging out. Accordingly, hanging out can indeed be considered to have been a common social phenomenon.

Keywords

Youth, hanging out, qualitative research, history of youth, the Netherlands

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Introduction

Young people like to spend their leisure time in peer groups, preferably outside in the street and away from parental or other adult supervision (Matthews et al., 2000). This way of spending free time is interpreted by some researchers (Matthews et al., 2000; Tani, 2015) as 'hanging out', meaning 'to be around' or spending time somewhere with peers, usually for no particular reason and without doing anything noteworthy. Other researchers (Eaton et al., 2015; Sleight, 2016; van Hessen, 1965) have pointed out that hanging out is also an opportunity for young people to meet dating partners. Researchers sometimes use different terms for this social phenomenon, for example, unstructured socializing (Hoeben, 2016; Hoeben and Weerman, 2016; Osgood et al., 1996), loitering (Akiyama, 2010) or sauntering (van Hessen, 1965).

Several studies (Gillis, 1974; Hardwick, 2008; Sleight, 2016; van Hessen, 1965; Weinstein, 2002) suggest that hanging out as a common social phenomenon (Qvortrup, 1993, 2001; Timmerman, 2010, 2012; van Hessen and Klaassen, 1991; Woodman, 2013) dates back to the late Middle Ages. Historians and social researchers (Gillis, 1974; Hardwick, 2008; Sleight, 2016; van Hessen, 1965; Weinstein, 2002) have found examples of young people hanging out in the Netherlands, Italy, France, Great Britain, the USA and Australia, although in these cases it was referred to as strolling, perambulating or walking out rather than hanging out. This was 'a common ritual of historical socialization [of youth]' (Sleight, 2016: 87). Today, hanging out continues to be a widespread social activity among young people illustrated by studies in many countries and cultures. Geographers (Pyyry, 2016; Pyyry and Tani, 2016; Tani, 2015), for example, have elaborated on the social meanings of public places for young people hanging out in the USA and Finland. In addition, a large international study in Europe, the USA and Latin America (Junger-Tas et al., 2012) found that the majority of youngsters (almost 75%, $n = 67,883$) spend leisure time outside their own homes at least once a week, for example, hanging out in the street.

On the other hand, studies in the USA and the Netherlands (Anderson and Hughes, 2009; Hoeben, 2016; Hoeben and Weerman, 2016; Muller, 2016; Osgood et al., 1996) have also explored and described hanging out as an activity associated with deviant behaviour and delinquency. According to these studies, young people who hang out supposedly have low socio-economic backgrounds and feel more negative about interacting with their parents. This can lead to spending even more time hanging out and may include engaging in deviant behaviour or delinquency (Persson, Kerr and Stattin, 2007). In the past, society has also considered young people hanging out to be a problem, a threat to public order and an activity affecting a young person's reputation (Sleight, 2016; Tani, 2015). Historically, boys hanging out were associated with gang activity, while girls risked their reputations as 'good girls' (Maynes, 2008; Thomas, 2005; van Nijnatten, 1985). Over the past three decades, research into hanging out among young Dutch people has become increasingly focused on criminality (Muller, 2016). In contrast to international research, Dutch research on hanging out as a common social phenomenon (Timmerman, 2010, 2012; van Hessen, 1965) is scarce.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, we want to explore whether the phenomenon of hanging out can be understood as a common social phenomenon in the Netherlands from 1930 to 1960. To our knowledge, hanging out during this

period in the Netherlands has not yet been studied. Second, we want to explore what hanging out meant for young Dutch people in the same period, from 1930 to 1960. In this way, we hope to contribute to the knowledge of youth-life practices (i.e., hanging out).

In this article, we study the social lives of young Dutch people from a historical–sociological perspective. This perspective regards youth as a distinct aspect of a society’s social structure, that is, a permanent social category between childhood and adulthood (Brentjens, 1978; Hazekamp, 1985; Qvortrup 1993, 2001; Timmerman, 2012; van Hessen, 1965; 1972). Youth as a social category has its own structure and culture parallel to mainstream structure and culture, but distinct in the way that young people create and recreate it themselves by ‘being young together’ (van Hessen, 1965: 56). They socialize with peers without the interference of parents and other adults. ‘Being young together’ has evolved and changed over time, even though certain aspects such as activities have remained more or less the same (van Hessen, 1972). Van Hessen (1965) described ‘being young together’ in a sample of 300 older men and women who talked about their youth around the 1900s. In doing so, van Hessen’s study, which also focused on hanging out (then called ‘slen-teren’, the Dutch term for hanging out, roughly translated as ‘sauntering’) founded a sociological research tradition. In this article, we build on this tradition by exploring hanging out in youth life.

To explore the practice and meaning of hanging out by young Dutch people between 1930 and 1960, we use qualitative and quantitative data from the ‘Jeugd in drie generaties project’ (youth in three generations project), a major long-term research project about youth life in the Netherlands (Timmerman, 2010). Interviews for this project were conducted with three consecutive generations from the same family. The current study focuses on the oldest generation, with respondents talking about their youth from 1930 to 1960. We formulated three research questions. First, were young Dutch people between 1930 and 1960 familiar with the phenomenon of hanging out? Second, did young Dutch people between 1930 and 1960 participate in hanging out, and if so, how? Third, what did hanging out mean for young Dutch people at that time?

Historical Context: 1930–60 in the Netherlands

Opportunities to spend time with peers in the period 1930–60 (e.g., hanging out) were affected by a focus on respectability and the Second World War. Decency and respectability were important values in the upbringing and supervision of children by their parents. For instance, when and for how long young people could spend time in the street were common questions in 1930–40 (Bakker, Noordman and Rietveld-van Wingerden, 2006). Concerns about young people spending their time inappropriately led adults to found youth associations, sometimes cooperating with young people (e.g., youth movements, church associations, neighbourhood clubs), in which time could be spent ‘properly’ (de Rooy, 2006). Membership of these gender-segregated and ideologically compartmentalized clubs was common around 1930–40. Respectability was particularly important for girls, both working and non-working (van Drenth and Te Poel, 1992). Girls should grow up acquiring the ‘right’ values and behaviours.

The war years (1940–1945) were a cause of concern for adults too (Bakker et al., 2006). Young people had to cope with difficult circumstances (Kennedy, 1995) such as poverty, curfews and adults ‘squander[ing] all their values’ (de Rooy, 2006: 166). The results of a (non-representative) survey ($n = 2,299$, 18–30 years) showed that young Dutch people regarded the War as an influential factor on their lives (Goudsblom, 1959). Youth associations were founded again after the War to act as a counterweight to the fear of demoralization and to increase the ‘moral resilience’ of young people. Adults were particularly anxious about working and middle-class youth, and worried about the sexual behaviour of girls, particularly those working in factories, and rowdiness in boys (Bakker et al., 2006). Although membership of youth clubs recovered after the War, the number of members declined after 1952 (de Rooy, 2006). Young people sought other ways to spend their extended leisure time without the continuous supervision of adults (e.g., the cinema and dance halls).

Data and Method

The Youth in three generations project started in 2007 and is still ongoing (Timmerman, 2010). Students and researchers from the Department Pedagogical and Educational Sciences at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, carried out semi-structured qualitative interviews, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Students were instructed to recruit a family with three generations (grandparent, parent and child) where the youngest generation was aged 17 or 18. Respondents could come from within the family, a fellow student’s family or from within their circle of acquaintances (e.g., neighbours, friends of the students’ parents, etc.).

Using an open interview format applied to previous retrospective life-story research (van Hessen, 1965), we explored youth life in the past. The relationship between the story told in the present and the life lived in the past is an important issue in life-story interviews (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2017), yielding some methodological considerations. One is the interviewee’s distance to the interview topic: grandmothers reflect differently on their youth than the granddaughters currently experiencing it (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2003; Brannen, 2004). This can lead to different ‘genres’ in interviewee narratives. For example, in extended descriptions of youth life in the Netherlands (1890–1920), interviewees mostly used ‘we’ when they spoke about peer activities (van Hessen, 1965). In a three-generation study on Norwegian women, interviewees born between 1910 and 1925 were characterized as ‘good storytellers’ (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2017: 54). Vivid illustrations were given of concrete events (activities) complemented by specific details (what was eaten). Narratives of the youngest generation were more inconsistent as these descriptions focused on their current life phase (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2003).

In memory construction, interviewees can use various discourses, depending on the sociohistorical context they grew up in (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2003). It is therefore important to disentangle the extent to which interviewee narratives are shaped by the present context, and if and how interviewees move between the past and the present in their reflections (Brannen, 2004). In van Hessen’s study (1965) of the youth of 300 people, interviewees tended to shift between their youth and childhood. The current study must be aware of such considerations. As it is possible for an

interviewee's narrative to shift between the present and the past, efforts were made to eliminate this by repeatedly reminding the interviewee that the questions focused on youth. By being questioned in this way, the interviewees should have shifted less in their reflections.

The interview was divided into several topics: family life and upbringing, school time, leisure time, friendships and activities with peers. Questions were based on van Hessen's study (1965). Examples of questions include: 'How did you experience your upbringing by your parents?', 'What did you do on Sundays individually or with your family?' and 'Did you prefer to do something different and if so, why?' In addition, questions were asked about family composition, education and place of residence during youth to contextualize the answers. Interviewees were also questioned about social activities with peers in their leisure time, after school or on the weekend. Specific questions about 'sauntering' focused on interviewees' familiarity with hanging out (van Hessen, 1965). Were they aware of hanging out or had they participated in it? What could the interviewee relate about the phenomenon? Where did young people hang out? On what days and times? Why did they do it? The interviewees were prompted to talk about hanging out in their own words.

From the 205 interviews conducted between 2007 and 2012 (men $n = 46$, women $n = 159$), 30 interviews with men and 30 interviews with women from the oldest (grandparent) generation were randomly selected. In 12 of the 60 interviews, the interviewer and interviewee were relatives (grandparent–grandchild). In the other 48 interviews, there was no evidence of kinship. During the period 1930 to 1960, the 60 interviewees lived through their youth, that is, were between 14 and 24. 'Youth' was defined as falling between these ages as participants were expected to have left primary education by the age of 14, transitioning to secondary education or work. In those days, youth was considered to have ended by the age of 24, in the vast majority of cases through marriage (van Hessen, 1965). General characteristics of the interviewees, such as birth year, religion, socio-economic background and province of residence are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that most of the male interviewees were born in 1932, while most of the female interviewees were born in 1927. The majority of interviewees had a religious upbringing and more than half of the interviewees came from a low socio-economic background. The majority of interviewees resided in a northern province during their youth.

The interviews were coded and analysed by a researcher and co-researcher with Atlas.ti software (Friese, 2012) using the Constant Comparative Method (CCM) (Boeije, 2002; 2005) which makes it possible to trace the different ways and circumstances in which social phenomena occur. CCM was used here to develop relevant coding categories by grouping answers from interviewees in different codes and to further refine these codes during analysis. First, using open coding, all the relevant interview fragments within an interview were given a code (hanging out). All relevant fragments about hanging out were then coded in the same way in subsequent interviews. This resulted in 99 quotations about hanging out. Second, we compared the coded interview fragments with each other using axial coding and applied specific subcodes (time, gender-segregated, dating) based on research by van Hessen (1965). Each interview was studied and compared to the other interviews to achieve

Table 1. General Characteristics of the Interviewees

		Male	Female
Birth year	Min	1919	1920
	Mode	1932	1927
	Max	1937	1938
Religious upbringing ¹	Yes	23	25
	No	7	5
Socio-economic background ²	Lower	16	16
	Middle	13	13
	Upper	1	1
Province of residence ³	North ⁴	25	25
	South ⁵	7 ⁶	7 ⁷

Source: Authors' research.

- Notes:**
1. Although the majority of the interviewees were religious during their youth, the analysis showed that religion did not play an important role in the practice of hanging out.
 2. The socio-economic background of the interviewees was based on the occupation of their fathers, in line with classification by Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2006).
 3. Limburg and Flevoland did not appear as provinces of residence during youth according to the interviewees' answers.
 4. These are the provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, Noord-Holland and Overijssel.
 5. These are the provinces of Gelderland, Utrecht, Zuid-Holland, Zeeland and Noord-Brabant.
 6. Two male interviewees lived in provinces in both the north and the south of the Netherlands during their youth.
 7. Two female interviewees lived in provinces in both the north and the south of the Netherlands during their youth.

consensus in the interpretation of fragments and to refine codes. This included changing the definitions of codes, merging codes or changing names (e.g., gender-segregated was changed to gender-segregated groups, dating was changed to meet, flirt with and date other young people, with 'affecting reputation' as a sub-subcode). Subcodes were grouped together when they covered a certain aspect of the main code. For example, time, locations, gender-segregated groups and routines were developed and grouped under 'practices of hanging out', which was later changed to 'features of hanging out'.

Results

The constant comparative analysis of the selected interviews resulted in three different key themes (based on the main coding categories): (a) familiarity with and participation in hanging out; (b) features of hanging out and (c) meanings of hanging out. The results of the analysis will be described according to these themes. Figure 1 presents the main categories (main codes) and subcodes (the * symbol refers to a sub-subcode) used in Atlas.ti.

As interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch, quotations have been translated into English. Where quotations are used, the interviewee's gender and year of birth are shown in brackets.

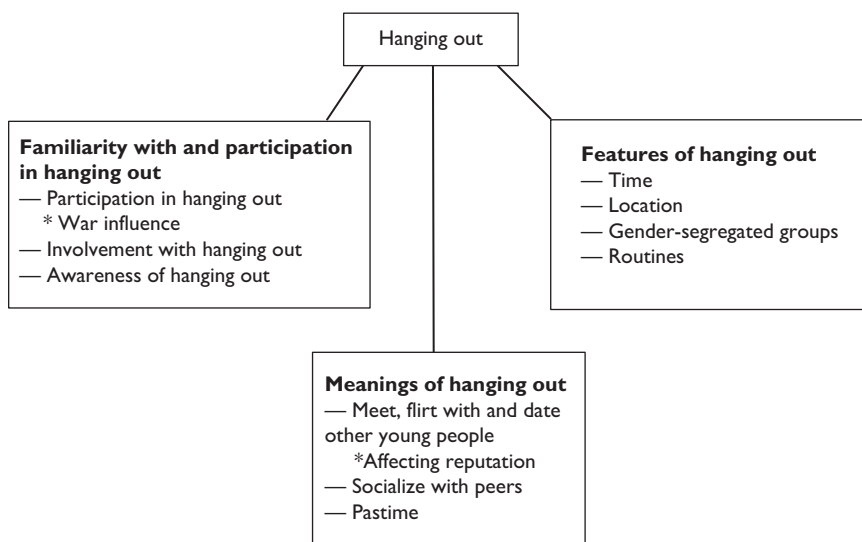


Figure 1. Overview of Main Categories (Key Themes), Subcodes and Sub-subcodes

Source: Authors' research.

Familiarity with and Participation in Hanging Out

Hanging out appeared to be a well-known social activity for the majority of respondents and was a common way of being young together (see Table 2).

In Table 2, it can be seen that of the 60 men and women interviewed, slightly over three quarters of the interviewees ($n = 46$) reported being familiar with hanging out or had participated in it, while around a quarter of the interviewees ($n = 14$) told the interviewer that they were not aware of this social phenomenon or that there was no such thing as hanging out where they lived. A little over half of the interviewees ($n = 33$) provided answers when questioned about this phenomenon and approximately half of them ($n = 27$) spontaneously talked about hanging out previously in the interview. Did this knowledge of and participation in hanging out differ by gender and socio-economic background? (see Table 3)

Table 3 shows that with respect to the gender and socio-economic background of interviewees, the practice of hanging out was indicated as much by men as by women (16 out of 30 and 14 out of 30) and somewhat more by interviewees from a lower socio-economic background compared to the middle socio-economic group (17 of 32 and 13 of 26), although the differences are small. Table 3 indicates that interviewees from a high socio-economic background ($n = 2$) did not report practicing hanging out. In summary, according to the information given by interviewees about their youth, it seems that hanging out was a well-known and common social phenomenon, particularly for young people in the middle and lower socio-economic groups.

Opportunities to practise hanging out were different during the War years (1940–45). Approximately two-thirds of interviewees ($n = 41$) were young in (some of) these years. In the narratives of 19 interviewees, the War affected opportunities for peer activities (e.g., hanging out). Based on the interviewee narratives, in general there

Table 2. Familiarity with and Participation in Hanging Out

	Total
Did hang out	30
Knew about it, but claimed to be uninvolved/were not clear about involvement	16
Did not know about hanging out	10
There was no such thing as hanging out	4
Total	60

Source: Authors' research.

Table 3. Practice of Hanging Out, by Gender and Socio-economic Background

	Did hang out		Did not hang out		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Upper	–	–	1	1	2
Middle	7	6	6	7	26
Lower	9	8	7	8	32
Total	16	14	14	16	60

Source: Authors' research.

were fewer opportunities for peer activities. Festivities or holidays (e.g., annual village festivities) were not celebrated. Being in the street was not always allowed because of curfews, ‘During the War, we did not have any say. For a long time, you had to be inside before [11 or] midnight, and for quite a long time we had to be inside before 8 p.m. Eight o’clock!’ (i48: female, 1923). Interviewees mentioned differences in the years before the War: ‘When the War started you had nowhere to go. Everything came to an end because we were not allowed to be in the streets anymore and the evenings were dark and scary’ (i48: female, 1923). Consequently, young people spent more time at home with their families, ‘Furthermore, during the War you were not allowed in the streets when it was dark. So you were at home with your family most of the time’ (i4: male, 1922). In sum, the interviewees noticed the influence of the War years on their participation in hanging out.

Features of Hanging Out

The second key theme identified in the analysis concerns features of hanging out. We divided these features into four categories: time (when), location (where), gender-segregated groups and routines.

First, almost half ($n = 29$) of the interviewees mentioned times of the day when young people got together to hang out, for instance, at fixed moments during the weekend, on Saturday and Sunday evenings ($n = 12$ and $n = 14$). A small number of interviewees ($n = 8$) referred to hanging out on Sunday afternoons, while one interviewee spoke about hanging out on Sunday mornings after church. Apparently, hanging out on weekdays was less common. Only four interviewees mentioned Wednesday, Wednesday evening or Thursday. This could be explained by long

workdays experienced by the majority of interviewees which left no time on week-days to hang out. The weekend was, according to the interviewees, the time to hang out with peers, 'It had to be at the weekend, or we wouldn't have had the time!' (i24: male, 1931).

A second feature of hanging out concerned the locations that young people chose to meet each other. Approximately, a third of the interviewees ($n = 18$) talked about locations such as particular streets in the village or city (i.e., 'main street' or 'church street'), a pre-determined route, or more general descriptions (i.e., walking around the village). A male interviewee (i24: 1931) explained, 'We walked around the village very often (...) It began on Sunday morning after church (...) well, then we strolled'. Streets were not the only spaces for hanging out. Interviewees also mentioned dikes, the woods, the port, a dam and town or market squares as places for meeting peers without adult supervision. Sometimes these places were further towards the outskirts of the village or town, for instance, towards a dam or a route through the village to the water tower. According to two interviewees, hanging out locations could vary by time, a walk from the village to the dam on Sunday afternoon and in the evening hanging out on a particular street, (i10: male, 1927) and season, '(...) in the woods near the pond on Sunday evenings in the summer (...) In the winter, we stayed in [the village]' (i33: female, 1935).

Gender-segregated groups seem to characterize hanging out. A third of interviewees ($n = 20$) stated that there were no mixed groups (both sexes) hanging out in the street. Separated from each other but accompanied by one or more friends, girls and boys went to the agreed places to hang out, and met each other there. Gender segregation was prevalent at that time—not only in hanging out but also in general. 'The girls walked [in groups] separated from the boys' (i6: male, 1934), 'boys and girls were strictly separated' (i16: male, 1926) and 'we treated [the] (...) other [sex] differently' (i24: male, 1931).

The last feature concerned hanging out routines, mentioned by two-fifths of the interviewees ($n = 24$). Interviewees spoke about walking up and down the street, walking in the opposite direction to each other (i.e., groups of boys and girls) or on different sides of the road, and walking in circles. A female interviewee (i39: 1927) explained, 'In [our village], the boys walked in circles through the forest and the girls walked in circles in the opposite direction, meeting each other half way when we said "hello" to each other'. Other variations on this theme were walking arm in arm with same-sex peers and one female interviewee (i44: 1927) spoke about distinct routines by gender, 'They [the girls] walked from one side [of the street] to the other and then everywhere, near the shops, (...) in a corner the boys watched the girls walking by'.

Meanings of Hanging Out

The third key theme focused on deriving meanings of hanging out. In nearly half ($n = 29$) of the 60 interviews analysed, indication was found that hanging out was an opportunity to meet, flirt with and date other young people, to socialize with peers and a way to pass the time.

Hanging out as an opportunity to meet, flirt with and date other young people was the most frequently mentioned by nearly a third of the interviewees ($n = 17$). Some

male interviewees talked about women walking in the street or certain locations, using terms such as ‘the parade district’ or ‘the district where you could parade’, suggesting that these women were motivated by things other than walking. Meeting and flirting with other young people was explicitly stated in some quotations about hanging out, ‘The men looked at the women and the girls went to “hunt” the boys’ (i33: female, 1935) and ‘We walked back and forth the whole time. And while we were walking, we checked whether there was someone we liked (...)’ (i28: male, 1930). This could lead to dating:

So we always stayed in the main street, which was the women’s market, and there you walked up and down the street and you said ‘hi’ and talked with each other until you went off with each other. (...) Then they started dating, so to speak. (i18: male, 1932)

When dating became more serious and courtships began, it appears that it was considered inappropriate to continue to participate in hanging out, ‘Then you walked through Church Street. Yes, before I met him though! After that you didn’t hang out anymore (...)’ (i35: female, 1925). Another female interviewee (i34: 1920) remembered her boyfriend becoming very angry when he saw her hanging out with a boy:

[We, my female friend and I] walked somewhere, girls on one side of the road and the boys on the other side, you know. And she was alone so I walked with her and then a few boys talked to us. She liked that. But I wanted to go home. I had my bike with me and when I wanted to go home one of the guys had to go the same way as I did so he walked with me. But then, suddenly, my husband, my boyfriend, turned up. And he walked towards me and he looked very angry. He grabbed my arm and said ‘come with me!’ (...)

Ultimately, courtship could lead to marriage. This was true for six interviewees (two men and four women). For one woman, hanging out provided the opportunity to get to know her future husband, though courtship began in a different place, ‘I met my future husband in [a Frisian village] when we were hanging out, but he asked me at the skating rink’. The other five interviewees mentioned a street name or provided a short general description when the interviewer asked where they had met their future husband or wife. One female interviewee (i53: 1935) elaborated a little further:

On Sunday evenings, my female friends and I always went for a walk. The five of us, we walked arm in arm through the street and boys from [the neighbouring village] would also then appear and even more boys. My future husband was there too and that is how it happened.

Engaging in hanging out could affect a girl’s reputation, as noted by a small number of female interviewees ($n = 4$). These women were not allowed by their parents to hang out; they considered it an unsuitable activity for a ‘proper’ girl, ‘We were not allowed to take part, that was not appropriate for decent girls’ (i41: 1928), ‘Then you were a whore (...)’. It did not even occur to us. You would be a bad girl, you threw away your reputation (...) No, you did not think of doing it’ (i45: 1933). Hanging out was frowned upon by some interviewees: ‘In our view, hanging out was something inferior. It was not done, (...) hanging out in the street’ (i59: female, 1936). Although the quoted female interviewee described hanging out as inferior, she nevertheless still practised it herself, indicating the ambiguity of hanging out.

Socialization with peers was another frequently mentioned meaning of hanging out. An activity to ‘just be together with each other’. Around a quarter of the interviewees ($n = 14$) described this social activity, ‘We walked with each other and talked to each other and this lasted for a couple of hours’ (i9: male, 1933), ‘Our village was a village of small groups—well, and then we walked there. That was how you met each other (...)’ (i24: male, 1931), ‘[It’s] just normal, walking up and down the street in the village, to get to know new people’ (i21: male, 1925), ‘At every street corner you would meet a friend with whom you talked for a bit. After a while, you began walking again’ (i60: female, 1926). Socializing with peers could mean walking and talking, but first and foremost the young people sought each other’s company.

According to a few male interviewees ($n = 3$), hanging out was also just a way to pass the time. One man explained, ‘Yes, we walked up and down the street; there was nothing to do around there (...) But then you had something to do’ (i11: 1930) and ‘(...) there was nothing else to do. You just walked up and down a bit’ (i3: 1927). To these interviewees, hanging out was a relatively neutral activity.

Conclusion

This study explored whether hanging out among a sample of Dutch people could be understood as a common social phenomenon of their youth in the period 1930 to 1960 by qualitatively analysing retrospective interviews of 30 men and 30 women. Additionally, the study also explored the meaning of hanging out.

Our results indicate that the majority of interviewees were familiar with hanging out or hung out themselves. Hanging out was reported as often by men as by women, and slightly more often by interviewees from lower socio-economic backgrounds than interviewees from middle-class backgrounds. Interviewees reported the influence of the War years, during which there were fewer opportunities to hang out. According to the interviewees, hanging out mostly took place during weekend evenings, either on certain streets, on a pre-arranged route or by walking around the village. It was common to hang out in gender-segregated groups, following various routines (walking in the opposite direction to each other or walking up and down the street).

Hanging out held several meanings, of which the opportunity to meet, flirt with and date other young people was mentioned most frequently. Hanging out was also a way of spending time in company (being young together) even though a small number of female interviewees mentioned it could affect a girl’s reputation. Finally, for a small number of men hanging out was a pastime. Accordingly, based on familiarity, participation, features and meanings, hanging out can indeed be considered to have been a common social phenomenon for young Dutch people in the period 1930 to 1960.

Discussion

This study confirms that hanging out was a common social phenomenon for young Dutch people between 1930 and 1960 (Qvortrup 1993, 2001; Sleight, 2016; Tani, 2015; Timmerman, 2010, 2012; van Hessen and Klaassen, 1991). According to the

interviews analysed in this article, a majority of interviewees practised hanging out or knew about it. This is in line with previous studies about hanging out in the past (Gillis, 1974; Hardwick, 2008; Sleight, 2016; van Hessen, 1965; Weinstein, 2002) as well as findings in recent studies (Junger-Tas et al., 2012; Pyyry, 2016; Pyyry and Tani, 2016; Tani, 2015) in several countries and cultures.

The practice of hanging out in our study was frequently reported by interviewees from lower and middle socio-economic backgrounds. This was also found in a study by Sleight (2016), about young people in Australia around 1850–1914, who described ‘servants and working girls’ walking the streets. Interestingly, there were also places for ‘the better off’ to walk and meet each other, indicating that young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds were also familiar with hanging out. One of the interviewees in our study from a high socio-economic background was familiar with hanging out, but our sample of such interviewees was too small to draw further conclusions. It would be interesting to know more about hanging out among young people from high socio-economic backgrounds, in particular whether these young people met each other in different places from other youths. Future research could explore whether hanging out was indeed a segregated social activity.

Interviewees noted fewer opportunities to hang out during the War years, indicated by statements about curfews and family life. Research on historical circumstances around the War years and in the period 1930–60 in the Netherlands confirms this finding (de Rooy, 2006; Goudsblom, 1959). For example, in a study by Goudsblom (1959), young people reported the War as an influential factor on their lives. Societal changes between 1930–60, such as parental supervision around 1930–40 (Bakker et al., 2006) and extended leisure time around 1960 (de Rooy, 2006) may have led to differences in hanging out practices. Although the interviewees showed awareness of these changes in the interviews (e.g., going to cinemas or dance halls after the War), they did not provide fundamentally different stories about hanging out (i.e., hanging out did not disappear as a leisure activity). Hanging out was still a weekend activity in the 1950s and 1960s (only a handful interviewees indicated weekdays), and parental influence on hanging out participation, for instance, was noted by female interviewees who experienced their youth in the early 1940s and those who experienced it in the late 1950s.

Our findings are in line with other research into the meanings of hanging out in different periods (Sleight, 2016; van Hessen, 1965). We found the opportunity to meet, flirt with and date other young people (in some cases leading to marriage) to be the most important meaning of hanging out. Van Hessen (1965) noted similar findings. He discovered that young Dutch people around the 1900s were young together (hung out with each other) to find dating partners (i.e., a future spouse), as there were few opportunities to meet someone elsewhere. Hanging out was a ‘common ritual of historical socialization [of youth]’ (Sleight, 2016: 87), representing its significance to young people in the past. Young people in Melbourne, London and New York walked the streets to go to work, but more importantly, also to flirt with other young people ‘when groups encountered one another, playful remarks and giggling followed (...)’ (Sleight, 2016: 101).

However, hanging out does not necessarily refer to dating behaviour as our study also showed that hanging out was a way to socialize with friends, indicating it was a common social phenomenon. This was also found in a recent study of young Finnish people (Tani, 2015). Hanging out referred primarily to a common

social activity: flirting and dating was not the most important motivation. Hanging out by young people today is possibly less focused on dating because young people have more opportunities to meet their peers, including potential dating partners, for example, through social media (Meenagh, 2015). This could be an interesting topic for future research.

Our study also revealed that public opinion on hanging out considered it to be an inappropriate social activity for girls. Girls who hung out were regarded as indecent. The respectability of girls has been highlighted in previous research (van Drenth and Te Poel, 1992; van Nijnatten, 1985) and is not limited to the 1930–60 period. The ‘honour’ or ‘face’ of girls in public spaces has been a matter of concern since the distant past. As Maynes (2008: 117) notes (based on her work on European girls in 1750–1960), ‘public attention paid to a girl was a sign of her failure to maintain privacy and respectability, an indication that she was trouble, or in trouble’. In an empirical study on girls hanging out in Charleston (South Carolina, USA), Thomas (2005: 588) notes that in research literature on hanging out girls ‘must also deal with gendered ideals of femininity that further restrict their public behaviour’. This illustrates that the ‘face’ of girls in public space is still a theme in youth research.

The limitations of our study concern the research instrument, the interviewer–interviewee relationship and the sample. First, the retrospective semi-structured interviews in this article rely heavily on the interviewees’ memories of the distant past. Recalling specific events or activities is a complex process, and it is possible for memories to become corroded over time leading to ‘partial data’ (Gardner, 2001). In our exploration of hanging out, interviewees’ memories were triggered through ‘specifying’ questions (Bauer, 2007; Emans, 2002) about hanging out. For instance, this involved asking closed questions about facts or specific details (if interviewees were familiar with or practiced hanging out, at which locations hanging out took place, etc.). Thus, to some extent, it is possible to counteract bias in people’s memories (Bauer, 2007; Emans, 2002).

A second limitation concerns the interviewer–interviewee relationship. In our study, 12 respondents were relatives of the interviewers (grandparent–grandchild). On the one hand, Garton and Copland (2010) indicate that in ‘acquaintance interviews’, ‘in which interviewer and interviewee have a prior relationship’ (friends, colleagues, family members) (2010: 535), resources or information can be accessed which are not accessible in a traditional interview setting. On the other hand, this pre-existing relationship could have biased our research results. Browne (2005) points out that it is possible that interviewees do not provide all the information they have when there is an existing relationship with the interviewer. This probably depends on the research topic. Although our study did not focus on a topic considered taboo or sensitive (see for example Browne, 2005), and our findings do not indicate that the picture of youth life provided by the grandparents differed from other interviewees, it is still possible that not all grandparents told their grandchildren everything they remembered about hanging out.

A third limitation is the sample of 60 interviewees on which we base our findings. The majority of the 60 respondents lived in the northern Netherlands. This could possibly distort our data, as hanging out in the northern part of the Netherlands could be different from the middle or south of the country. Despite this limitation in the study sample, we think our study provides valuable insights into the practices and

meanings of hanging out in the Netherlands as our findings on hanging out in the north are in line with the findings of van Hessen (1965) on hanging out in the middle and south of the country. Together, both studies add to our knowledge of hanging out as a common social activity of young people in the Netherlands from about 1900 to 1960.

Our study of the research literature leads us to conclude that researchers address hanging out differently. On the one hand, it is studied as a form of antisocial or risk behaviour. On the other hand, in several countries hanging out by young people is simply a common way of being young together. This was also found in our study. Future research on the practices and meanings of hanging out in more recent times could explore whether most young people still hang out to socialize with each other, find romance or engage in risk activities.

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